

## [Philosophy of Negro Laborers]

Letter on folklore

Accession no.

W3683

Date received

10/10/40

Consignment no.

1

Shipped from

Wash. off.

Label

Amount

3p.

WPA L. C. PROJECT Writers' UNIT

Form [md] 3

Folklore Collection (or Type)

Title Philosophy of Negro Laborers and

## Library of Congress

other examples of unpublished folklore

Place of origin Ill. Date 12/20/38

Project worker Ona Spencer?

Project editor

Remarks A letter from Ona Spencer to Dr. Dr. Frederick.

1

1

W3683

4006 So. Parkway, December 20, 1938

Negro Lore Ill 1937-38

Dear Dr. Frederick:

Concerning the folk lore survey: if this sort of material is acceptable, you can depend on me for regular contributions. Am considered an authority on negro folk lore — know considerable about the lore of United States hill country too. A few examples of unpublished material:

Philosophy of Negro [.]Laborers

I went to the school of mother-wit, the school that all d—— fools fail to attend. When you fool me, you will fool a fool who has fooled many. Still sow sucks the slop. A Yelping dog gathers no bones. High Pockets: "What makes a broke man sleep so sound?" [?]hawty: "Cause he didn't have nothing when he first laid down."

## Library of Congress

Received

DEC 23 1938

DIRECTOR

WRITERS' PROJECTS

ILLINOIS

[?]

### On Relief

The following is an endless song to which verses are made up on the spur of the moment and immediately forgotten; examples:

I kin tell by the shape of your head That you been eatin charity bread.

Response:

And I kin tell by the bend in your knees That you been eatin charity cheese, etc.

It might be interesting to have several hundred of these stanzas tracked down. They would, perhaps, paint a rather vivid picture of the feelings of a laborer on relief.

This is an item I submitted to Mr. Botkin's "Folksay" several years ago, pointing out that it seems highly flavored with the idiom of Chaucer: 2 2

A RIDDLE FROM THE HILL COUNTRY

## Library of Congress

"I got up one morning and I peeped through the crack; I sa saw Bumback in the wheely-whacky- whack, I stepped back to call Tom-tacky to rum Bumback, Out of the Wheely-whaly-whack."

Solution:

Bumback: Cow

Wheely-whacky-whack: Wheatfield

Tomtack: Dog

Heard on the day his Majesty, King George of England passed away: A group of Negro workman are warming their hands over a W.P.A. fire.

Cholly: "Well, I see where King George "cut-out."

Hinry: "That ' dude ' shore had the world in a jug and the stopper in his-hand." The[?]e These and hundreds of other items were picked up in thirty years contact with Negro folk types. Plu[?] Plus this, I spent twelve years researching up and down plantations, back streets and wharves, and as many years culling every available scrap of supplementary literature in preparation for my forthcoming volume

"The Romantic Evolution of Jazz."

From this book was adapted the great Century of Progress Pageant "O Sing a new Song," rated by reliable critics the greatest Negro production [?] in history , 2 because of its 4,000 actors, greatest Negro musicians in the world (W. C. Handy, Major Clark Smith, J. Rosemond Johnson, Will Marion Cook, etc.) carried in more daily papers than any other Negro undertaking (not excluding Green Pastures) because it drew the largest colored

## Library of Congress

attendance, 40,000. Richard B. Harrison was narrator and President Roosevelt pressed a button to start the show.

You can depend on me for other phases of folk life, as well as authentic historical backgrounds and interpretations of same.

Have contributed like material, assisting University of North Carolina's "Institute in Research of Social Sciences", quoted in this field by Dr. Guy B. Johnson, Clark B. Firestone (Sycamore Shores), P. D. Perkins, (author of the book OBSCURE WORKS OF LAFCADIO HEARNE) and in Frank Y. Grayson's volume "Thrills of the Historic Ohio River" and quoted in various newsprints and periodicals.

Several of my short folk stories and feature articles have appeared in magazines.

Hope I can be of service without being transferred from Mr. Farnol's Radio Group.

Please return clippings.

Yours sincerely,

Onah Spencer

Onah Spencer